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**United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**



Dillon Field Office

April 1999

**BLM Dillon Field Office
Initiates**

**OIL & GAS LEASING
MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN
EIS/AMENDMENT**

2000-000852/NF

C

Federal Minerals Analyzed In This EIS

- BLM
- State Lands
- Private Lands

Surface Ownership

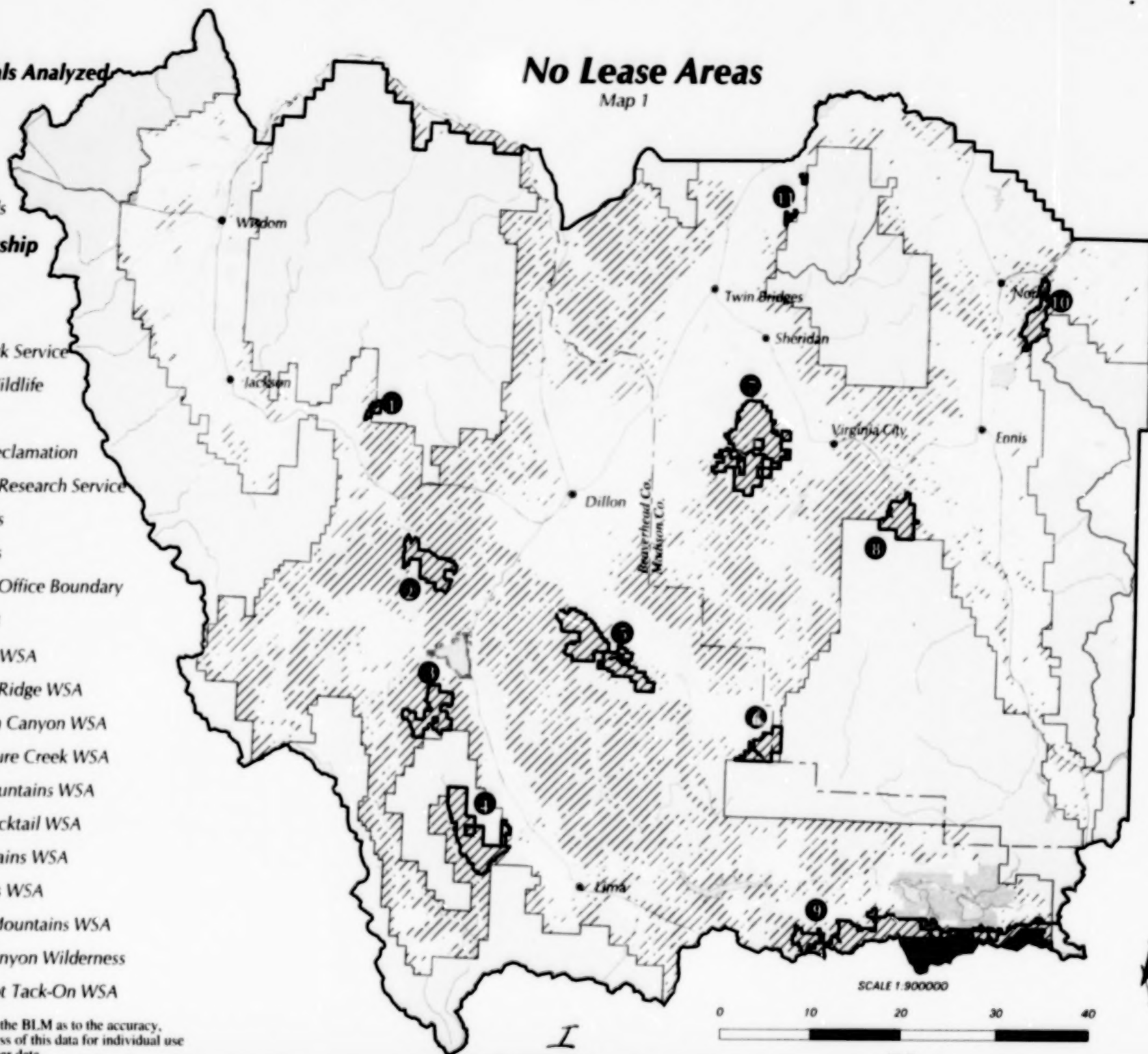
- BLM
- USFS
- National Park Service
- US Fish & Wildlife
- State Lands
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Agricultural Research Service
- Private Lands
- County Lines
- Dillon Field Office Boundary

No Lease Areas

- Farlin Creek WSA
- Henneberry Ridge WSA
- Bell/Limekiln Canyon WSA
- Hidden Pasture Creek WSA
- Blacktail Mountains WSA
- East Fork Blacktail WSA
- Ruby Mountains WSA
- Axolotl Lakes WSA
- Centennial Mountains WSA
- Bear Trap Canyon Wilderness
- Tobacco Root Tack-On WSA

No Lease Areas

Map 1



No Warranty is made by the BLM as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this data for individual use or aggregate use with other data.

SCALE 1:900,000

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MILES

The Bureau of Land Management, Dillon Field Office, has issued a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to prepare a Management Framework Plan (MFP) Amendment. This plan amendment will analyze the environmental impacts associated with leasing and development of oil and gas resources. The Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service will be cooperating agencies in this effort; however, the Bureau of Land Management will have the lead in preparing the amendment/EIS.

We are asking your assistance in making long term decisions concerning this issue. If you have an interest in this project, please review this scoping brochure and let us know if you would like to stay informed and involved as we prepare this MFP amendment and associated environmental impact statement. In order for us to keep you informed of this project, **YOU MUST** return the mailing sheet at the back of this brochure, with your mailing label on it. This way we will continue to keep you involved throughout the process. **Remember: if we do not hear from you, we will assume you no longer have any interest and you will not hear from us again concerning this subject!!!**

We would also like your thoughts about oil and gas leasing and development. We are in the early stages, so your thoughts and concerns are particularly important now in helping us shape this project. We have provided room for you to send us comments on the back of the mailing sheet. If more space is needed, please feel free to attach additional comments. Your general feelings about BLM's oil and gas leasing program are important to us. However, specific comments you can provide about issues you are interested in or which may improve the content of our future document and any data or data sources relevant to these issues are most helpful.

Please send your mailing sheet and any comments or questions you have to Scott Powers, Field Manager, 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, Montana 59725-9431 by **May 10, 1999**.

We look forward to working with you throughout this process.

**AREAS WHERE BLM WOULD NOT
AUTHORIZE LEASING**

Under any alternative BLM will not authorize
leasing in these areas:

WILDERNESS AREAS

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

(See attached Map #1)

**REASONABLE FORESEEABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

**WHAT IS A "REASONABLY FORESEEABLE
DEVELOPMENT" SCENARIO AND
WHY DOES THE BLM USE ONE?
HOW MANY WELLS WILL BE DRILLED
AND WHERE?**

The prediction of oil and gas activity is called the reasonably foreseeable development (RFD) scenario. It is based on geologic information from oil and gas exploration operations and economic trends, and the best estimate of what could realistically be expected to occur in the area. We use the RFD to predict the scale of expected operations - how big and how many - and analyze the impacts that could occur if oil and gas leases are issued within the area.

(See the full discussion about the RFD on page 4 and Map #2 to see how many wells could be drilled and where we believe oil and gas activity could occur within the project area.)

Potential for Development of Oil and Gas

Map 2

Development Potential

■ Moderate

■ Low

□ Very Low

▨ Land within USFS
boundaries previously
analyzed in the
Beaverhead NF EIS

--- County Lines

— Dillon Field Office Boundary

◇ Dry & Abandoned - No Shows

◇ Dry & Abandoned - Gas Shows

◆ Dry & Abandoned - Oil Shows

Areas Where Exploration is Forecast

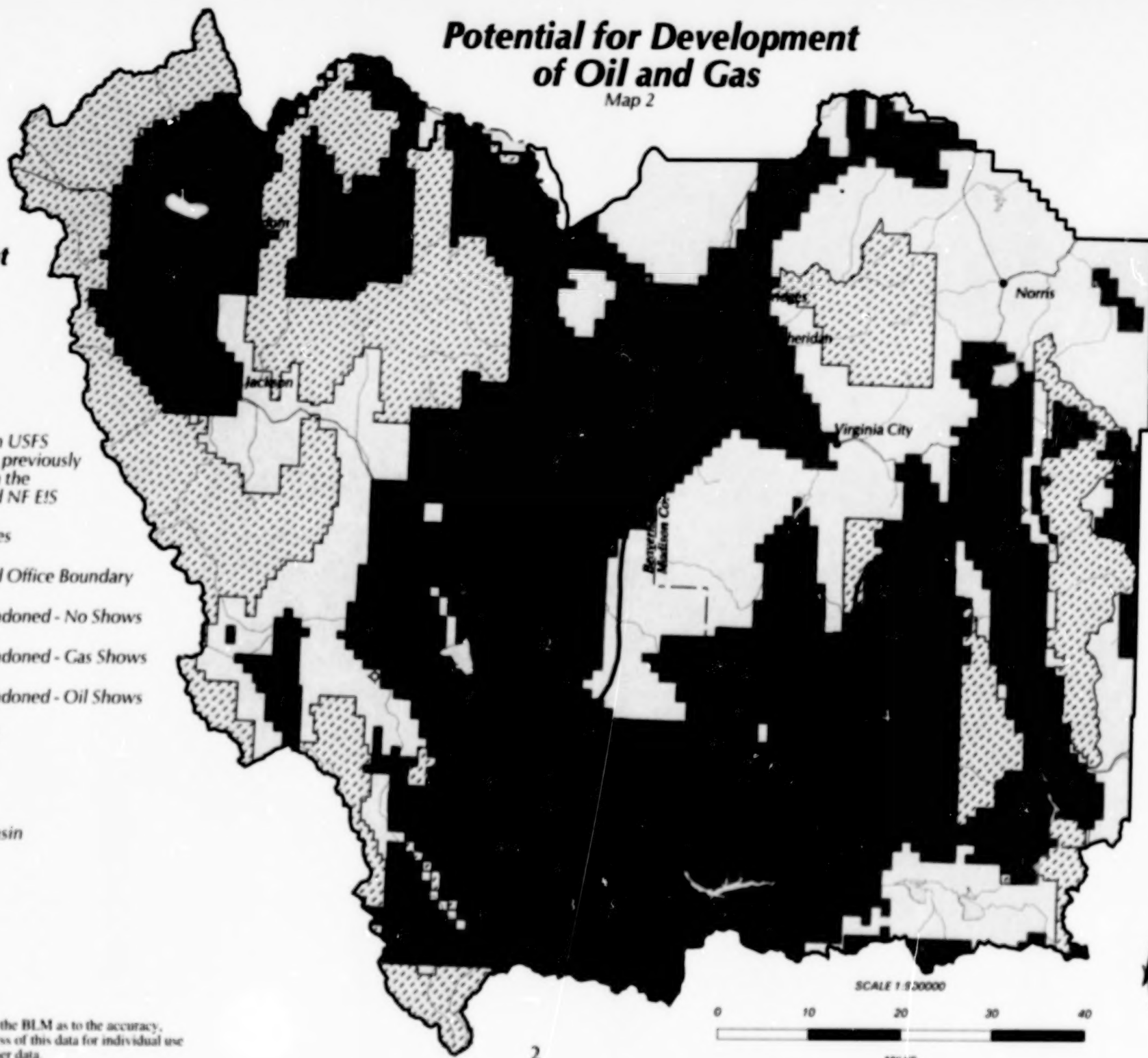
① Big Hole Basin

② Dillon

③ Lima

④ Gravelly

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or aggregate use with other data.



DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The Dillon Field Office (DFO) encompasses the southwestern portion of Montana and most of Beaverhead and Madison counties. Our planning area includes approximately 902,528 acres of public land and 1,305,504 acres of subsurface mineral estate administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM DFO administers most of this area; however, 59,287 acres of public land located immediately south of the Big Hole River in the extreme northern portion of Beaverhead County are under the jurisdiction of the BLM Butte Field Office.

The planning area is spanned by six major mountain ranges: the Gravellys, Blacktails, Centennials, Pioneers, Tobacco Roots, and Rubys. Within the planning area, there are an estimated 1,000 miles of perennial streams and 500 miles of trout fisheries. Nationally known fisheries include the Madison, Big Hole and Beaverhead Rivers.

WHY WRITE THIS EIS?

The BLM, as an agent for the Secretary of the Interior, has responsibility for leasing and managing oil and gas resources where the mineral estate is federally owned. For many years, the public has been concerned that the BLM's oil and gas leasing process may not adequately comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements to analyze and disclose the cumulative impacts of oil and gas activities. Leasing activity within the area has been limited since about 1989 because of this concern and a general decrease in leasing interest.

To resolve concerns about the oil and gas leasing decision process, BLM consulted with representatives of environmental groups and the oil and gas industry to revise its environmental analysis standards for oil and gas leasing decisions made in land use plans. This resulted in new BLM planning guidance for fluid mineral resources in 1986 and 1990. We made a commitment to update our land use plans that needed to achieve compliance with the new standards, starting with high priority areas with existing oil and gas development and a high level of leasing interest. These areas are primarily east of a northwest to southeast line running from Toole County to Carbon County, Montana, and South Dakota. The plan updates for these high priority areas are almost complete. We have also limited lease issuance within the planning area until an analysis for leasing decisions includes the following key elements according to the standards in BLM's new planning guidance for fluid minerals:

- Oil and Gas Potential
- Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario
- Direct and Indirect Impacts
- Cumulative Impacts
- Lease Stipulations

The Beaverhead National Forest (NF) issued its oil and gas leasing decision in February 1996, and some of these lands have recently been leased for oil and gas. Federal mineral estate managed by the BLM is found adjacent to Beaverhead NF lands throughout the project area and some leasing interest has overlapped onto BLM lands. Several lease applications have been suspended as a result of our decision not to lease in sensitive areas until this EIS is complete.

A leasing decision would carry out Congressional direction for oil and gas leasing outlined in the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920; Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands of 1947; Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970; and Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

Finally, completing a Field Office-wide analysis will ensure consideration of cumulative impacts and result in oil and gas leasing decisions compatible with those for the federal mineral estate on adjacent NF lands.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

The procedure for preparing a Resource Management Plan (RMP), RMP or MFP amendment, or EIS supplement involves nine interrelated actions as shown below on the Progress Scale. Some actions may occur simultaneously and it may be necessary to repeat an action as additional information is made available. The revised Land Use Plan which results from this process is a decision document designed primarily to help field office managers make decisions and to guide the efforts of staff on a day to day basis. Where more detailed management direction is required, activity plans will be prepared after the plan amendment is completed.

Progress Scale

1. Identification of Issues
 2. Development of Planning Criteria
 3. Inventory Data and Information Collection
 4. Analysis of the Management Situation
 5. Formulation of Alternatives
 6. Estimation of Effects
 7. Selection of a Preferred Alternative
 - a. Draft EIS
 - b. Final EIS
 8. Record of Decision
 9. Monitoring & Evaluation
- 

OIL AND GAS LEASING HISTORY IN BEAVERHEAD AND MADISON COUNTIES

Before 1975 only a few oil and gas leases were issued in the area. In 1976, near the time of discoveries in the Wyoming Overthrust Belt, interest in oil and gas leasing increased sharply. By 1982, exploration companies had leased 2,320,470 acres of federal mineral estate within the area (about 1.1 million on NF lands). As leases expired, very few leases were issued after 1988. Today only 40,170 acres remain under lease, including 29,837 acres recently leased on the Beaverhead NF.

A total of 18 oil and gas wells were drilled in the project area between 1975 and 1987. Despite extensive leasing of federal minerals during the late 1970s and early 1980s, only 5 of these 18 oil and gas wells were drilled on federal mineral leases (2 on NF lands).

OIL AND GAS REASONABLY FORESEEABLE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

In order for the BLM to analyze the effects of oil and gas leasing and subsequent possible exploration and development, we had to complete the best possible analysis of how many wells industry might drill in the next 10 to 15 years. The BLM has developed a "reasonably foreseeable development scenario" (RFD scenario) using historical oil and gas development information from the United States Geological Survey, BLM files, and other technical sources.

BLM has mapped the potential of occurrence of oil and gas under Madison and Beaverhead Counties and the potential for industry to develop those possible resources. The classification of the development potential is depicted on attached Map #2. From these maps and other information, including leasing history and past and present economics, we forecast how many wells might be drilled in all of the two counties on all mineral ownerships.

Based on our analysis, we estimate that perhaps six wildcat wells could be drilled in the area in the next 10 to 15 years. (A "wildcat well" is an exploratory well drilled in an area with no existing production.) Of these six wells, we estimate that four would be dry holes. (If no economically producible oil or gas is discovered, a well is called a "dry hole.") Dry holes would be plugged and abandoned with surface reclamation occurring shortly afterward. We estimate one dry hole would be on BLM minerals. We believe that two of the wells could have gas discoveries. One would be on either BLM minerals or lands administered by the Forest Service (FS). The other would be on privately owned minerals. Each of those wells would probably prompt several additional step-out wells. (A "step-out well" is a well drilled adjacent to or near a proven well to discover the limits of the oil or gas reservoir.) For

analysis purposes, we estimate that four step-out wells would be drilled, two for each discovery. Further development would hinge on the results of the discovery wells and initial step-outs.

Some readers might note that this forecast is somewhat different than that adopted by the FS for their oil and gas leasing EIS for the Beaverhead National Forest. First, it must be noted that the forecast for the Beaverhead EIS only covered lands administered by the FS. And that document chose to project all wells as if they would occur on FS lands. Our forecast examined all of Beaverhead and Madison Counties. Second, our forecast was completed several years after completion of the forecast for the Beaverhead EIS. During that time the economic outlook for the oil and gas industry has changed along with the completion of a dry hole in the area.

On attached Map #2, you'll see the areas exploration might occur in the two counties. We forecast that the six projected wildcat wells would be drilled somewhere within the boundaries of these four areas. We project a discovery well in "Area #1" on privately owned minerals. Two wildcats are projected for "Area #2", one on private minerals and one on BLM administered lands. Two wells, one a discovery, are projected for "Area #3." These wells could either be on Forest Service or BLM lands. Finally one well is projected for "Area #4." This well would be on Forest Service land. Understand that the BLM is not able to forecast the exact locations for wells that might be drilled in the future. This is a matter that future federal oil and gas lessees will decide for themselves based on their own more detailed analysis of the geologic and geophysical data that they will collect before drilling. Nor do we have any control on the location of wells drilled on private lands if the minerals are not owned by the federal government. The location of new wells will also be strongly influenced by lease stipulations developed in the plan amendment we are starting. Location of wells on the Beaverhead National Forest would be controlled in large part by the stipulations that were developed in their oil and gas leasing EIS. This document will not address FS lands. By looking at what would happen if wells were drilled in the indicated areas, we can predict possible environmental effects.

Based on information about wells drilled in this area during the 1970s and 80s, we believe that a typical hypothetical drilling site could disturb from 2.5 to 3.5 acres (for the drill pad, pit, and other disturbance). This could affect 15 to 21 total acres for the six exploratory wells during drilling. Typically, each new access road to a location could require no more than 3.5 miles of new construction. The area disturbed by these roads would average 2.2 acres per mile of road for a maximum disturbance of approximately 46.2 acres disturbance for the exploratory wells. Some sites may require little or no construction of new access roads. As noted above if a well is a dry hole, surface reclamation will occur shortly after the well is abandoned. If a well is a producer much of the disturbance required during drilling will be reclaimed shortly after the well is put on production. It should also be noted that there will be additional infrastructure developed if the two fore-

would include such items as a possible gas transmission pipeline and field gathering lines. Actual amounts of disturbance will not be known until and if any wells are drilled.

WHAT DECISIONS DO WE HAVE TO MAKE?

While the Manager for the Dillon Field Office has the task of preparing the EIS, the official who will make the final decisions in this EIS on how and where to allow oil and gas leasing is: LARRY E. HAMILTON, State Director of Montana/Dakotas, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

We will decide whether or not to lease the federal minerals and under what conditions if leasing is the preferred option. The contractual controls existing in the lease provide substantial latitude for the BLM and we may require modification of the siting, design and timing of operations on leaseholds and interim and final reclamation measures. If resource conflicts are not resolved under standard lease terms and oil and gas regulations for lease operations, special stipulations may be used to modify operations, restrict use or deny lease operations on portions of, or the entire lease. A discretionary closure is an option if the BLM determines that oil and gas leasing, even with the most restrictive stipulations (including No Surface Occupancy for the entire leasehold), would not adequately protect other resources on land uses. Lands may also be closed to leasing if the BLM determines that areas should be protected by No Surface Occupancy stipulations but such restrictions would prevent reasonable development of the lease.

When we first started updating our land use plans to reconsider oil and gas leasing decisions, we asked our resource specialists to develop a set of oil and gas leasing stipulations that could provide adequate protection for the resource concerns identified within the area managed by the Montana BLM organization (Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota). This package was completed in July, 1990. We will use this stipulation package as our proposed action for this EIS. The federal mineral estate, except the no leasing areas found on Map #1 (135,484 acres), would be leased with the stipulations outlined below for specific areas that are identified in this EIS, along with the standard lease terms. We recognize that this stipulation package was developed over eight years ago and much of the emphasis by our resource specialists was based on the land use plans (eastern two thirds of Montana and South Dakota) under development at that time. For these reasons we believe this proposed action may evolve further or change based on your comments during this scoping period and our subsequent analysis.

Standard Lease Terms

"Standard terms" are defined in the lease and BLM's oil and gas regulations. They are a part of every lease issued. These terms regulate operations on the

the land, air and water, to cultural, biological, visual, and other resources along with other land uses or users. Standard terms allow us to relocate any proposed operations up to 200 meters (656 feet). We can also prohibit new surface disturbing operations for up to 60 days in any lease year. (NOTE: 200 meters=656 feet=0.12 miles; a circle with a 0.12 radius=31 acres)

Stipulations

"Stipulations" place additional limits on oil and gas exploration and drilling activity. There are three types of lease stipulations: No Surface Occupancy, Timing Limitation, and Controlled Surface Use.

No Surface Occupancy - This stipulation precludes disturbance or use of the surface for exploration and development activities. A leaseholder would still have the right to the oil and gas resources contained on the lease. However, drilling will have to be done from a portion of the lease or from an adjacent area where surface occupancy is allowed. Drilling a lease in this manner is known as "directional drilling." The July 1990 lease stipulation package applies this stipulation to the following areas:

- Riparian areas, 100-year flood plains of major rivers, and on water bodies and streams
- Existing land use leases, easements and rights-of-way

(These first two are normally linear features, therefore the stipulations would only apply to areas that cannot be protected by the 200 meter relocation allowed under standard lease terms, because of their size.)

- Developed and undeveloped recreation areas receiving concentrated public use
- Within 1 mile of identified peregrine falcon nesting sites
- Within 1/2 mile of known bald eagle nest sites which have been active within the past 7 years and within bald eagle nesting habitat in riparian areas
- Within 1/2 mile of known ferruginous hawk nest sites which have been active within the past 2 years
- Within 1/4 mile of grouse leks
- Within 1/4 mile of designated reservoirs with fisheries
- Within cultural sites or areas designated for conservation use, public use, or sociocultural use
- Within designated paleontological sites

Timing Limitation - This stipulation is a seasonal restriction. It prohibits all activities on all or portions of a lease parcel for more than 60 days but less than a full year and it does not apply to the operation and maintenance of production facilities. The July 1990 lease stipulation package applies this stipulation to the following areas and time frames:

- Within 1/2 mile of raptor nest sites which have

- In grouse nesting habitat within 2 miles of a lek from March 1 to June 15
- Within crucial winter range for wildlife from December 1 to March 31

Controlled Surface Use - This stipulation is used where oil and gas activities must be strictly controlled to protect specific values or resource concerns. Occupancy and use of the surface are generally allowed on all or portions of the lease year-round if certain conditions or objectives described in the stipulation are accomplished. For example, it might be used to protect scenic settings. A lessee may be required to locate, design, paint or otherwise camouflage facilities to blend with natural surroundings. The July 1990 lease stipulation package applies this stipulation to the following areas, and include the described objectives:

- Slopes over 30 percent - Before surface disturbance, an engineering/reclamation plan must be approved by BLM. This plan must demonstrate how:
 - Site productivity will be restored
 - Surface runoff will be adequately controlled
 - Off-site areas will be protected from accelerated erosion
 - Water quality and quantity will be in conformance with state and federal water quality laws
 - Surface disturbing activities will not be conducted during extended wet periods
 - Construction will not be allowed when soils are frozen
- Visual Resource Management Classes II, III, and IV
 - All surface disturbing activities, semipermanent and permanent facilities in these areas may require special design including location, painting and camouflage to blend with the natural surroundings.

Even though this EIS will use the best available resource data and professional judgement, we sometimes find changes to inventory data that could alter the requirements for protection of certain resources. This EIS must also disclose conditions for considering applications to waive, except or modify (WEM) lease stipulations to allow for these changing conditions and incorporation of new resource information. If consideration for granting a WEM involves a major issue or may be controversial, the action will be subject to at least a 30-day public review.

These actions are not granted often, nor are they granted indiscriminately. For example, granting access into a core winter range before the end of the period specified by a timing limitation stipulation is an example of an "exception." Resource specialists may determine that the winter has been "open" and wildlife have moved away from their core winter range for that year. Based on this information, an "exception" may be granted, but it would only apply for that year and under the conditions that the duration of the exception

WHAT'S OUR TIMEFRAME / HOW CAN YOU STAY INVOLVED?

The BLM will have to complete a number of steps prior to the issuance of the Record of Decision in March 2001. The first step, issuing a Notice of Intent to do a MFP EIS/Amendment, was published in the Federal Register on December 17, 1998. The second step includes this brochure which explains the proposal and asks for your comments and concerns. The remaining steps listed in the following schedule are other times we would like your involvement in this project.

MFP EIS/AMENDMENT SCHEDULE

12/17/98	NOI Published in Federal Register
4/99	
5/10/99	30-Day Public Review-Scoping Brochure
7/99	Alternative Package Review
10/99	Chapters 1, 2, & 3 Review
6/00	90-Day Public Review-Draft EIS
3/01	30-Day Protest Period-Final EIS
5/01	Record of Decision Issued

Our interdisciplinary team will describe the likely effects of oil and gas leasing, exploration and production on resources on lands administered by the BLM. Some of the key resource values we feel could be affected include: westslope cutthroat trout habitat; big game (primarily elk and mule deer) winter range; travel management related actions such as new roads; cultural and paleontological sites; dispersed recreational opportunities including hunting; and threatened and endangered species (bald eagle, peregrine falcon, grizzly bear and gray wolf).

You may have other concerns you would like to raise. If so, we need to receive your comments by May 10, 1999, in order to consider them in the analysis of the draft EIS/Amendment.

We will keep you up-to-date and involved in the remaining steps in the schedule. Information we receive from you and other BLM specialists will hopefully provide for a quality document resulting in sound resource decisions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this informational brochure. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the BLM Dillon Field Manager, Scott Powers.

☐ Please retain my name on your mailing list. (Mark any changes on address label on reverse side.)

☐ I would like BLM to hold a public meeting.

COMMENTS:

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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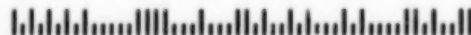
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10-28-99

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prepared after the plan amendment is completed.

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each well, the stipulations developed in the plan amendment we are starting. Location of wells on the Beaverhead National Forest would be controlled in large part by the stipulations that were developed in their oil and gas leasing EIS. This document will not address FS lands. By looking at what would happen if wells were drilled in the indicated areas, we can predict possible environmental effects.

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Standard Lease Terms

"Standard terms" are defined in the lease and BLM's oil and gas regulations. They are a part of every lease issued. These terms require operations to be conducted in a manner that minimizes adverse impact to

- Within 1 mile of identified peregrine falcon nesting sites
- Within 1/2 mile of known bald eagle nest sites which have been active within the past 7 years and within bald eagle nesting habitat in riparian areas
- Within 1/2 mile of known ferruginous hawk nest sites which have been active within the past 2 years
- Within 1/4 mile of grouse leks
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- All surface disturbing activities, semipermanent and permanent facilities in these areas may require special design including location, painting and camouflage to blend with the natural surroundings.

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Our interagency team will describe the likely effects of oil and gas leasing, exploration and production on resources on lands administered by the BLM. Some of the key resource values we feel could be affected include: westslope cutthroat trout habitat; big game (primarily elk and mule deer) winter range; travel management related actions such as new roads; cultural and paleontological sites; dispersed recreational opportunities including hunting; and threatened and endangered species (bald eagle, peregrine falcon, grizzly bear and gray wolf).

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